

ATLANTIC YARDS: WHAT WENT WRONG

Five years later, a look back at a developing debacle



By Sarah Portlock
The Brooklyn Paper

It remains the question that is on every Brooklynite's mind: What is going on at Atlantic Yards? The answer: just about nothing. Five years after Bruce Ratner introduced his sweeping vision for a 22-acre mini-city on and around the Long Island Railroad train yards — which would

balloon into a \$4.2-billion, publicly subsidized project including 16 skyscrapers, a 19,000-seat sports arena, 6,800 apartments, and top-grade office space — reality has trumped the dream. Of the 16 skyscrapers, Ratner is only speaking about building two in the near term — and even those are delayed. The project's centerpiece — the iconic "Miss

Brooklyn" tower at the gateway to Atlantic Yards, the corner of Atlantic and Flatbush avenues — isn't part of the complex anymore, a victim of Ratner's inability to land an anchor tenant for its commercial or office space. The site of an arena for the Ratner-owned New Jersey Nets, the most highly touted and arguably popular element of the project remains an empty

pit, instead of hosting National Basketball Association games by 2006 as originally promised. While ongoing litigation — one of the last major cases won't even be heard until January — may have contributed to some delays, the economy's collapse is the biggest player right now. Ratner's parent company, the Ohio-based Forest City Enterprises, admitted this week that even it doesn't

know what the future will hold for Atlantic Yards. "We remain committed to this project," Forest City CEO Charles Ratner told investors on Wednesday — but then quickly allowed reality to seep into his conference call. "When we get — and we believe we will — successfully through the last of the litigation in 2009, we'll evaluate the market at the See **FIVE YEARS LATER** on page 14

THE MAN WHO LOST TO OBAMA!



WINNER AND LOSER: As president of the Harvard Law Review, Barack Obama is in the center of this archival shot of the 1990 staff. The man he defeated, Park Sloper David Goldberg, is in the far left bottom corner.

It is no small thing to say that a Park Slope lawyer named David Goldberg is one of the most important figures in American history. Goldberg, you see, ran against Barack Obama for president of the Harvard Law Review in 1990. So it stands to reason that if Goldberg had won, perhaps he — and not Barack Obama — would now be the president-elect. Uh, no. "If I had actually beaten Barack, it would have very quickly revealed what a lousy president of the United States I would be," said Goldberg, who ended up serving as Obama's articles editor before beginning a legal career that included clerking for Ruth Bader

THE BROOKLYN ANGLE

By Gersh Kuntzman

Ginsburg (before she was a Supreme Court justice) and David Souter (when he was one, a stint at the White House as a special counsel) in the personnel office, and a private practice specializing in civil rights law. Despite Obama's election in November to the highest office in the land, Goldberg is definitely not sitting around thinking about what might have been had he assumed the highest office in the

land of Harvard lawyers. "When I ran for president of the Law Review, my dream was to sit in a library and read legal documents, not manage 70 or 80 people, deal with self-important law professors and students, or mediate debates — the stuff that Barack was, and is, great at," Goldberg said. "Barack's management style and competence stood out, even then." Until now, Goldberg has not spoken to the press about the events of that long February day in 1990 when 19 ambitious young legal minds set out to win the job of Law Review president. But he

Pizzafiti confession

Cops: Deliveryboy admits to defacing elevator

By Mike McLaughlin
The Brooklyn Paper

The boneheaded pizza deliveryman caught on security cameras scratching his cheesy tag into a Brooklyn Heights elevator has confessed to the vandalism, a police source told The Brooklyn Paper. Cops say the defendant, Mohammed Ali, was caught carving "Dizzy CFM" into the wood-paneled of a Livingston Street apartment building between Court and

Clinton streets on Oct. 17 — and the story was front-page news last week. Ali, a former employee of Papa John's, was collared within a week of the crime and he promptly confessed, said a source at the 84th Precinct. "He was very remorseful," the source said. Perhaps so, but Ali's lawyer said that her client has not pleaded guilty to the caught-on-camera crime. "It's not likely that he'll com-

ment because it could affect the case," said Ali's attorney, Megan Foley. The man behind the "Dizzy CFM" scratchiti also did not respond when The Paper offered to become an online "friend" through Ali's Myspace.com page. That social networking site did reveal a trove of information about the suspect, including some fleet footwork in a dance video. The accused vandal will be See **PIZZA** on page 14

Fossella's new digs

Congressman gets five days in slammer

By Mike McLaughlin
The Brooklyn Paper

Disgraced Rep. Vito Fossella has been ordered to spend five days in jail later this month for drunk driving, a Virginia judge ruled on Monday — but the

lovechild-siring congressman may escape prison, thanks to a state law that awards him a brand new trial. Minutes after Judge Becky Moore had the Bay Ridge Republican with the mandatory five-

day sentence, Fossella appealed, triggering Virginia's automatic re-trial, this time by jury. The legal process in Virginia is a lengthy one," said Barry Polack, Fossella's attorney. "This See **FOSSELLA** on page 14



FROM THE HOUSE TO THE BIG HOUSE: Rep. Vito Fossella (inset) has been sentenced to serve five days in jail, even before his term in Congress ends on Jan. 1, 2009.



HERE'S SCOTT: This picture tells you everything you need to know about Scott Herman of "The Real World: Brooklyn."

AB FAB!

Real World Brooklyn's Red Hook crib notes

By Sarah Portlock
The Brooklyn Paper

If MTV "Real World" castmate Scott Herman's wishboard (two is any indication, the reality show's 21st season is going to be absolutely awesome). The 23-year-old body builder is one of eight roommates in the Red Hook house. Actually, make that eight and a half roommates: castmate Devyn Simone, 20, bought a toy Yorkie, whom she named Brooklyn. The dog is the only member of the cast to cuddle with Devyn, by the way; the cast member and former beauty queen, reminds viewers, "It's easier to get into Heaven than to get into Devyn." These are the flashes of genius that journalists were able to collect last Thursday as MTV gave the See **FABULOUS** on page 14



Paws and Claws received a stack of 116 summonses in one day. What's going on?

Mom and Pop say Bloomy is \$squeezeing them

By Mike McLaughlin
The Brooklyn Paper

A Clinton Hill pet store that got hit with 116 city summonses in one day has become the poster child for the excesses of an anti-small-business mayor. Entrepreneurs, residents and elected officials were apoplectic after reading last week's Brooklyn Paper front-page story on

Simone and Ricardo Olton, owners of Paws and Claws on Fulton Street, who received \$8,700 in fines on one day for fliers that they had illegally posted on city property. The 116 tickets came on one day because city Sanitation enforcement officers are allowed to board illegal fliers for as long as they want — and then dump them on business owners who

may not even realize that they had been breaking the law. "More than \$8,000 [in fines] will put him out of business, and we don't want that," said Councilwoman Letitia James (D-Clinton Hill), who wants the city to reduce the penalties on the Oltons. All week long, outraged readers posted comments on BrooklynPaper.com, and interviews with small businesspeople around the

borough revealed a strong overtone of resentment at how the city enforces regulations that affect commerce. "The city obviously has statutes in effect that conflict with a friendly environment for small businesses," posted "Soured in Red Hook." Shopkeepers complain that the Department of Sanitation uses a fine-toothed comb during

inspections. The agency raised \$31.9 million through fines in 2006, up from \$18.8 million in 2003, city records show. "I've been given a \$100 ticket for having one cigarette butt on my sidewalk," said the owner of a picture-framing company who did not want to be identified. "It's really annoying, but it's the price of living in the city." In spite of the criticism, the

Department of Sanitation says its employees are just upholding existing rules to keep the city clean. It is illegal to post fliers, lamposts, "No Parking" signs, fire hydrants, garbage cans and other city property. "The Department enforces the law as it is written, and the law is clear that each illegal posting is a separate violation," said department spokesman Matthew

LiPani. Indeed, some business owners insist that the Oltons have no one to blame but themselves for not knowing the law. "This is something you don't want to mess around with," said Wayne Herman, co-owner of the recently opened Minuteman Press on Atlantic Avenue. —with Zeke Faux and Evan Gardner

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THE stoop

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT

PARK SLOPE

More delays for armory

By Sarah Portlock

The much-anticipated Park Slope Armory won't open at least until the spring — more than a year after local polls gathered for the official ribbon cutting. The Brooklyn Paper has learned.

The news of yet another delay is no surprise to Park Slopeers. In 2004, the city first announced it would rehabilitate the run-down Eighth Avenue building, and said it would open by 2006. But when construction was complete by January, the city admitted it hadn't found an operator for the space and couldn't open it to the public.

The Prospect Park YMCA secured the deal in March, and has been negotiating with the city ever since.

And this time, Y officials are saying that the opening next spring is for real.

"We've reached a full agreement on all the major points and the [10-year] contract is being drafted now," YMCA Executive Director Sean Andrews told The Brooklyn Paper this week. "Everything is going ahead as quickly as possible."

"We understand that this has been a lengthy process," he added. "We're moving ahead and we have a lot of the key pieces in place."

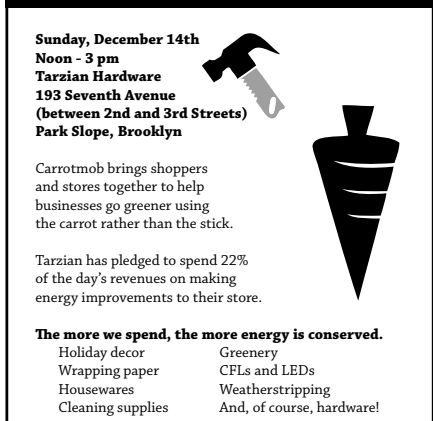
The city held that now-infamous ribbon-cutting in February after the Y was selected to operate the Armory.

A promise that the armory would open in September proved to be too optimistic, and the date was pushed back to January.

The athletic center, restored at a cost of \$16 million, spans nearly an entire block between 14th and 15th streets and Seventh and Eighth avenues. The

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Get your Gershon

Our editor, Gersh Kuntzman, donned his tuxedo to man the moderator chair for a very special year-in-review edition of Brooklyn Independent Television's "Reporter Roundtable." Joining Gersh was former Brooklyn Paper reporter Dana Rubinstein, now of the New York Observer, and two special guests!

The show will air on Monday, Dec. 15, at 9:30 pm and repeat on Thursday, Dec. 18, Monday, Dec. 22, and Thursday, Dec. 25, at 1:30 and 9:30. Time Warner subscribers will find the show on channel 56, while Cablevision customers will see it on channel 69.

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Pols back bike fight Jews

Yassky, Marty now call on city to remove Kent Avenue lanes

By Ben Muessig
The Brooklyn Paper

Several Williamsburg elected officials — some of whom fancy themselves as bicycle advocates — have joined a coalition of Hasidic residents and local business owners in now demanding that one of the lanes be removed to restore parking on the east side of the busy avenue.

A who's who of electeds and neighborhood leaders — including Borough President Markowitz and Councilmembers David Yassky (D-Williamsburg) and Diana Reyna (D-Bushwick) — made their demand known in a letter to the Department of Transportation on Dec. 5.

Yassky — a backer of bike-friendly initiatives, including a long-planned Greenway that will eventually create two bike lanes on Kent Avenue that are buffered from car traffic by a line of trees — signed on after taking heat from the Williamsburg's Satmar community at a neighborhood forum last month. At that meeting, one of the community's spokesmen, the City Council candidate Isaac Abraham, threatened that Hasidic Jews would block traffic to protest the bike lane.

But Yassky's spokesman said his boss hasn't changed gears when it comes to cycling.

"[Sending such a letter] seems like an anti-bike thing, but that's not where we're coming from at all," said Yassky's spokesman Jake Maguire.

"We want to see a bike lane there and we expect to see a bike lane there, but we want a bike lane that the community supports and one that is implemented in a way that is collaborative," he added.

Community Board 1 member Evan Thies, also a Council hopeful, said he signed the letter to encourage the city to get started on the long-promised Greenway — a pair of walking and biking paths stretching from Greenpoint to Sun-set Park.

Thies told The Brooklyn Paper that the best way to jump-start the Greenway — which was backed by CBI by an overwhelming vote of 39-2 in April — is to put "both [existing] bike lanes on the west side of the street now."

"That way we can plant our flag there and build out [the Greenway] accordingly in the next few years," said Thies.



MEAN Streets
The battle for Brooklyn's byways

But cycling advocates fear that removing even a single lane could put bicyclists in grave danger.

"If you take away bike lanes, you are feeding into that driver's sense of entitlement to the entire street," said Teresa Toro, chair of Community Board 1's Transportation Committee. "If drivers feel more entitled to the road, it could be open season for bicyclists."

That opinion has some support at the Department of Transportation, whose bike program coordinator Josh Benson told The Brooklyn Paper three weeks ago that the agency had no plan to remove the bike lane on the west side of the street.

But the pols' letter may be changing things. This week, the agency's spokesman Seth Solomonow said DOT was now looking into the matter.



This was Kent Avenue before a northbound bike lane was painted. It may look like this again soon.

New 'ghost' of the Slope

By Ben Muessig
The Brooklyn Paper



This "ghost bike" is at Eighth Avenue and President Street, where biker Jonathan Millstein died.

Cycling activists locked a white-painted bicycle to a street sign at the corner of Eighth Avenue and President Street in Park Slope on Dec. 2, turning the site of a fatal crash into a makeshift memorial.

Biking advocates from the New York City Street Memorial Project installed a plaque and a "ghost bike" — adorned with plastic flowers — on the corner where 50-year-old cyclist Jonathan Millstein lost his life after colliding with an empty school bus on Sept. 10.

The haunting monument is part of the group's planned Jan. 4 Memorial Ride and Walk, which will visit the sites of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities around the city, including the corner of Boerum Place and Livingston Street, where 8-year-old Alexander Toulouse was run down in September.

The "ghost bike" isn't the first improvised memorial for Millstein. In October, an artist stenciled an outline of a played body on the asphalt at the corner where Millstein died, listing his name, the date of his death, and the declaration: "Killed by bus."

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Slope burglar gets a shower break

78TH PRECINCT

Park Slope
A man broke into a Park Place apartment on Dec. 2 and stole two bicycles while the owner was in the shower.

The owner told cops that he heard a loud crash at 8:20 a.m., and ran out of the bathroom to find the broken window on his front door. When he ran out to find the building, which is between Sixth and Seventh avenues, he saw a man walking away with his bikes.

Wearing nothing but a towel, the victim was unable to chase the burglar.

Armed robbers

Two men knew exactly what type of crime they were committing on Dec. 5 when they entered

a Fifth Avenue store, drew a pistol, and told the clerk, "This is an armed robbery!"

A surveillance camera showed the perp entering the shoe store, which is between 13th and 14th streets, at 2 p.m., threatening the clerk, and drawing \$300 from the register.

3 x coat = arrest

A thug with a knife vainly tried three times to steal a man's coat on Nov. 30.

The near-victim told cops that a man with a ponytail approached him in the Ninth Street R-train station at 11 p.m. and demanded his jacket. The man refused and tried to get away by boarding the train, but the perp followed, again demanding the jacket.

When the man got off at 45th Street, the thug followed him into the street, drew a knife, and once more demanded the coat. The victim once again refused and ran away, leaving the crook empty-handed.

POLICE BLOTTER

Find more online every Wednesday at BrooklynPaper.com/blotter

84TH PRECINCT

Brooklyn Heights-DUMBO

Semiotic silliness

Cops are looking at a second possible bias incident in Brooklyn Heights this week, after a resident on Hicks Street found an anti-Semitic note posted to his front door on Dec. 8.

"The situation is being investigated," said a cop source, noting that in both circumstances the victims are Jewish.

Last week, a homeowner one block away on Pineapple Street found a note in thick black marker that said, "Kill Jews."

Stickup

Two perps held up a fast food joint on Remsen Street at 6:40 p.m. on Dec. 1.

The pair entered the soup-serving mainstay, which is near Court Street, ordered food and sat down to eat it.

But moments later, they stopped the manager as he took the register drawer to the office

upstairs in preparation for closing up for the night. That's when one perp pulled a gun and ordered three employees to hand over their wallets and cellphones and wait in the freezer for 10 minutes or he would shoot them, cops said.

The second perp pulled out his own gun and went upstairs to the office and ordered the manager to get money out of the safe. The manager complied, and handed him more than \$7,000.

Scrooged

A perphike into a Smith Street apartment on Dec. 2, picking the lock with a screwdriver and stealing a laptop, iPod, and \$150.

The victim, who lives near Bergen Street, left for work at 8:40 a.m., but when he came home just before 6 p.m., his front door was busted open and his things were missing.

Tha'd up

A perp broke into a Montague Street restaurant in the early morning on Dec. 7, stealing \$450 and two iPods.

Employees left the eatery, which is between Hicks and Henry streets, just after midnight, but when they returned nine hours later, the front door was broken.

Plumb gone!

A burglar masquerading as a

plumber stole two laptops from a woman's apartment as she sat in the next room on Dec. 6.

The incident happened just after noon, when the perp knocked on the woman's apartment, which is on Court Street between Livingston and Schermerhorn streets, and said he needed to check her bathroom because there was a leak downstairs.

The unsuspecting victim let him in and went into her bedroom, but when she came out moments later to check on him, the man — and the laptops — were gone.

Steak and mugs

A man mugged a woman with a steak knife on Dec. 6, making off with her wallet and cellphone near the F-train stop at York and Jay streets in DUMBO.

The woman was walking on Jay Street at just after 7 a.m. when the perp approached and said, "Give me your money and don't scream, or I will stab you." He then pulled out a steak knife, and aimed it at her.

The woman, who lives in Brooklyn Heights, complied and watched as the perp fled on York Street.

76TH PRECINCT

Carroll Gardens

Cobble Hill-Hill Hook

Third's a charm

An insistent and insatiable robber stole \$11,100 from a Smith Street bank on Dec. 6.

The bandit, wearing a white mask, handed his victim's backpack to a teller at 10:35 a.m. and said, "Don't play with me — fill it up!"

The employee of the bank, which is between Warren and Baltic streets, plopped \$1,000 into the villain's satchel, but that wasn't enough to satisfy the thief, who carried an unidentified object believed to be a weapon that was covered with a white cloth.

She gave him another \$5,000, but again, the vandal enjoined her to provide him with more money. Again, she surrendered \$5,000. This time, he fled into an SUV outside the bank.

Kane and able

A quick-working thief stole a wallet from a Kane Street apartment on Dec. 4 while the resident was home.

The victim, 31, told police that sometime between 4 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. while she was in her living room, she heard her front door open. When she investigated, she saw that her wallet was gone from its resting place on a table near the entrance and the door to her flat, between Clinton Street and Tompkins Place, was left open.

68TH PRECINCT

Bay Ridge

Tale of 2 burgs

On Dec. 1, someone burgled a home on 82nd Street, between Fifth and Sixth avenues. The owner told cops that he left for work at around 9 a.m., but a doorknob was broken off the front door and a \$1,500 laptop was gone when he returned eight hours later.

Two days later, someone broke into a 74th Street home while its owner was at work. The 43-year-

old owner of the home, between Fourth and Fifth avenues, told cops she was away between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., but came home to find nearly \$5,000 worth of electronics and shoes missing from inside.

Lots of green

Two men broke into a Fifth Avenue bodega on Dec. 3 and got away with lots of cabbage.

The 40-year-old owner of the grocery store, which is between 72nd and 73rd streets, told cops that she closed up the building just before 11 p.m. When she returned the next morning at around 6:15, she noticed that the cellar gate padlock was broken and more than \$3,500 was missing from a safe.

Car break

Someone broke into a car parked on 80th Street overnight on Dec. 4.

The 58-year-old owner told cops that he parked his car between Narrows Avenue and Colonial Road around 8 p.m. When he returned to his vehicle the next day at around noon, he found the driver's-side door lock broken and a \$2,000 navigation system missing.

88TH PRECINCT

Fort Greene-Clinton Hill

Run for her life

A teenage girl collapsed at a junior high school after fleeing from a pack of four other teens who had just robbed her on Park Avenue on Dec. 3.

The victim, 15, said a quartet of young ladies stole her cellphone and earrings at 11:05 a.m. between Cumberland and Carlton avenues. The teen then bolted to a nearby middle school where she crumpled from the ordeal. Emergency responders treated her there.

Alley' cat

A bowling alley's parked Chevy on Clermont Avenue was right up the alley of a burglar who looted sporting equipment out of the car on Dec. 6.

The thief smashed the passenger-side rear window while the car was parked between 11:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. on the lane between Lafayette and DeKalb avenues. He stole four bowling balls, two pairs of bowling shoes and a jersey, as well as the 48-year-old victim's checkbook and calculator.

Burg foil

Police cuffed a man who had broken into a Myrtle Avenue cafe on Dec. 7.

A witness called police after he saw a man inside the closed coffee shop at 1:20 a.m. Police arrived to find the 38-year-old intruder hiding inside the shop between Clinton and Waverly avenues. He entered by smashing a rear window with a rock.

Ground down

Hooligans robbed a woman at gunpoint on South Elliott Place on Dec. 5.

They approached the 25-year-old woman from behind at 1:05 a.m., and one of the miscreants pointed a gun at her head and ordered her to get on the ground between Lafayette and DeKalb avenues.

They nicked her purse, which contained \$60.

62ND PRECINCT

Bensonhurst

Gold scare

A man beat and robbed a 26-year-old woman on Bay 35th Street on Dec. 7.

The victim told cops she was between Bath and Benson avenues at around 7:30 p.m. when the suspect walked up, punched her in the face and began pulling her hair. He then grabbed the gold chain from around her neck and ran away.

Gang banged

Police arrested three teenagers accused of robbing a teenage boy on 26th Avenue on Dec. 4.

The victim, 14, was walking between Benson and Bath avenues at around 3:30 p.m. when the three thugs grabbed him from be-

hind and one threatened, "Give me your stuff or we're going to knock your teeth out!"

The boy handed over his phone and a gold chain to the suspects, who fled down 26th Avenue, but were later apprehended by police a few blocks away.

Breakdown

Someone attacked and robbed a man as he walked on 16th Avenue on Dec. 3.

The 18-year-old victim told cops he was at the corner of 80th Street at around 4:15 p.m. when a man jumped him from behind and began kicking and punching him.

When the victim fell to the ground, the suspect grabbed his phone and wallet and took off.

Gas pains

Two men robbed a New Utrecht Avenue gas station at gunpoint on Dec. 2.

The thugs entered the gas station, which is between 72nd and 73rd Streets, at around 2 a.m. One of the suspects pulled out a gun and ordered the clerk to get on the floor while the other suspect walked behind the counter and grabbed more than \$1,800 from the tiller.

Ban Quentin

Someone broke into a Quentin Road home on Dec. 5.

The 58-year-old owner of the home, which is between West Fifth and West Sixth streets, told cops that she the house at around 8 a.m. When she returned just after 2 p.m., the lock was broken off the front door and a computer and cellphone were missing from inside.

See BLOTTER page 15

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Third Sunday of Advent Worship Service
Sun., Dec. 21, 11:00 a.m.
Worship Service and Christmas Pageant
featuring the children and youth of Plymouth
retelling the story of the Nativity.
Sun., Dec. 21, 6:00 p.m.
Christmas Carol Service
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Wed., Dec. 24, 6:00 p.m.
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

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www.plymouthchurch.org

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Conservative Synagogue
768-1453 432-35

Zion Lutheran Church
125 Henry St./Clark Bldg. Bk.
Brooklyn Heights
718-425-2274 • www.zionlutheran.org
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Sun. 11:00 Holy Communion
(9:30 German [H. Barendse])
Wed. 7:30 pm Evening Prayer
LMB32-10

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Shop Near Home for Great Gifts for Everyone

In the buff

Got a fitness buff on your list? Give him or her a gift certificate to the Fifth Avenue Gym. The gym is offering holiday specials to help lighten the load on your budget. During December, you can get a three-month membership for \$99, or a one-year membership for \$299.

The gym also features "good, quality trainers for much lower than the standard price of \$70 or \$80 a session" said owner Matt Dwyer. The average cost of a session with one of the gym's trainers is \$50. With deals like this, you can buy memberships for everyone on your list.

Fifth Avenue Gym (555 Fifth Ave. at 15th Street in Park Slope, (718) 768-5990). Hours: Monday-Thursday, 5 am-midnight; Saturday, 5 am-11 pm; Sunday, 7 am-6 pm.

Stop whining and start winning

Need to grab something to impress the in-laws at the last minute? Head to Picadilly Vino, where the friendly staff will help you pick out a vintage to go with your holiday meal. Or for a vino-venturous friend, customize a gift bucket of exotic wines, like the \$40 "Islands of Italy" collection from Sardinia and Sicily.

Picadilly Vino (327 Fifth Ave., between Third and Fourth streets in Park Slope, (718) 499-2392). Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, noon-9 pm; Sunday, noon-6 pm. Web: www.picadillyvino.com.

It's an Obama-rama

The Pratt Store is the perfect place to find quirky, creative gifts for the lovable oddball in your life. For Obama fans, Pratt offers the Obamarama magnet set, which allows you to dress the future president (\$12.95). For the art history buff, check out the Great Artists finger puppet set, a collection of magnetic finger puppets of Monet, Dali, Van Gogh and Kahlo (\$19.95). Or, if your quirky friend is a budding psychologist, get him the Freud Watch (\$34.95). Whatever your friends are into, they are bound to get a laugh out of these gifts.

Pratt Store (550 Myrtle Ave., between Steuben Street and Emerson Place in Clinton Hill, (718) 789-1105). Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 am-7 pm; Saturday, 10 am-6 pm; Sunday, noon-5 pm.

The George Hamilton Treatment

Know someone who likes to have that just-came-from-the-beach look all year round? Give him or her a gift certificate to the Tanning Annex. With three levels of machines (the Hex II, the Sun Dash, and the Ergoline 450 bed) your wannabe beach bunnies can look like they live in a tropical paradise even when it's 20 degrees outside. The Annex offers 30-day unlimited packages for all three machines, ranging from \$49 to \$99.

Tanning Annex at Body Elite (348 Court St. at Union Street in Carroll Gardens, (718) 935-0088). Hours: Monday-Friday, 10 am-7 pm; Saturday, 10 am-8 pm; Sunday, 11 am-5 pm.

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Jewel of a gift

Roger Sattnick of Jewels by Sattnick offers so many items that it's impossible to recommend just one. He's been in business for 48 years, offering hundreds of unique gifts in his Downtown Brooklyn store. Got a difficult person on your holiday list? Just ask for Roger; he'll help you find just what you need.

Jewels by Sattnick 187 State St. between Court Street and Boerum Place in Downtown, (718) 852-1421 Hours: Monday-Friday, 10 am-6:30 pm; Saturday-Sunday, 11 am-5 pm

Big kids love toys, too

Mikey's Hook Up is an authorized Apple repair shop that can fix your Mac problems as effectively and more conveniently than sending it to the manufacturer. The store's geniuses handle more than just repairs, however. As a self-described "Mac-based creativity store," Mikey's sells home theater equipment, turntables, guitar cables and graphic design necessities like drawing tablets.

Mikey's Hook Up [70 Front St. between Main and Washington streets in DUMBO] (718) 596-1312 Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 am-7 pm; Saturday-Sunday, 10 am-6 pm. Other location is at 89 N. Sixth St. in Williamsburg, (718) 599-8906 Hours: Every day, 10 am-8 pm. Web: www.mikeyshookup.com.

Holiday beauty

Make someone feel gorgeous this year with a gift certificate to The Sanctuary Aveda Salon (they can be purchased online or in person). Women's haircuts start at \$55 and manicures at \$15, so you can give the gift of beauty without breaking the bank.

The Sanctuary Aveda Salon [527 Atlantic Ave. between Third and Fourth avenues in Boerum Hill, (718) 243-9300] Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11 am-7 pm; Saturday, 10:30 am-6 pm; Sunday, noon-5 pm; closed Monday. Web: www.sanctuarysalonbrooklyn.com

Handmade clothing for the holidays

If you're looking for a whimsical, handmade gift, Melting Pot has exactly what you need. Their hand-dyed batik shirts now come in holiday designs. Choose from a reindeer, snowflake, snowman or Christmas tree, available in sizes ranging from infant through adult (S16-S32). In addition to holiday items, Melting Pot offers an array of batik fashions in all sizes.

Melting Pot [492 Atlantic Ave. between Nevins Street and Third Avenue, (718) 596-6800] Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 11 am-6 pm; Sunday, noon-6 pm; Monday (Thanksgiving-Christmas only), noon-6 pm. Web: www.nancypot.com.

Priceless custom cards

Can't pick out the best holiday card for your loved one? Then don't! Create your own holiday card. Get great options for different styles with high-end fashion and high-quality material that you wouldn't find elsewhere. You can also retouch your favorite photos to turn those oldies into goodies.

Minuteman Press [305 Atlantic Ave. between Hoyt and Smith streets in Boerum Hill, (718) 858-0313] Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 am-5 pm; Saturdays, 10 am-3 pm. Closed on holidays. Web: www.brooklyn.minutemanpress.com.

For the love of steak

Know a steak lover? Then the perfect gift is Belmont Steaks. Purchase a gift certificate in any amount and fill their stomachs with their favorite meal.

Belmont Steaks [139 Flatbush Ave. in the Atlantic Terminal Mall, (718) 230-0244] Hours: Monday-Sunday, 11:30 am-10:30 pm. Closed on holidays.

Holiday house party

Don't forget to include your house in the holiday spirit! Decorate with lights, wreaths, and Santas to make your home part of this merry time.

American Housewares is offering a 10-percent discount on all holiday decorations during the month of December.

American Housewares [85 Court St. between Livingston and Schermerhorn streets in Downtown, (718) 243-0844] Hours: Monday-Saturday, 8 am-7:45 pm; Sunday, 10 am-6:45 pm.

For the office

Got a long "Nice" list this holiday season? Head straight for Court Street Office Supplies, where you can get everything from walkie-talkies (believe it or not, but they make a high-tech stocking stuffer, \$34) to the perfect briefcase (check out the Royce 636-5, a slim, functional, deluxe leather affair with lots of space, a magnetic clip, and even a BlackBerry holder, \$200); to thousands of other items.

Court Street Office Supplies [44 Court St. at Joralemon Street in Downtown, (718) 625-5771] Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8:30 am-6:30 pm; Friday, 8:30 am-1:45 pm; Sunday 11 am-4:30 pm. Web: www.courtstreetlogos.com.

Spicy Pickle catering

Have a group to feed this holiday season? Spice up your gatherings with fresh paninis, signature subs and salads, all made from scratch. Spicy Pickle uses freshly baked artisanal breads, and they pile on the very best meats, cheeses and veggies, then top it off with amazing homemade spreads. Call this month and save \$25 on any order over \$100.

Spicy Pickle [143 Montague St. between Clinton and Henry streets in Brooklyn Heights, (847) 463-9603] Hours: Monday-Sunday, 11 am-10 pm.

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For the four-legged

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NYCpet.com | 57 Clark St., between Henry and Hicks streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 852-7208 | Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 am-8 pm; Saturday, 9 am-7 pm; Sunday, 11 am-5 pm. Web: www.nycpet.com.

A bit of the bubbly

Got a wine connoisseur on the gift list? Don't turn him or her into a wine connoisseur by choosing the wrong vintage. Instead, grab one of Red, White and Bubbly's "Discovery" packs, a two-wine gift box featuring owner Darrin Siegfried's selection (buying bottles this way also saves 10 percent, but no one has to know). Siegfried also offers a "Best Buy" four pack whose selections also change each month. How good a buy? It's four bottles for under \$40 (again, it's our little secret).

Red White and Bubbly | 211 Fifth Ave. at Union Street in Park Slope (718) 636-9463 | Hours: Monday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm; Sunday, noon-8 pm.

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Santa's scooter

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The Vespa S50, a modern version of the classic Florentine scooter that startled the likes of Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn around the Roman coliseum, can be yours for \$3,399.

Vespa Brooklyn | 215 Park Ave., at Vanderbilt Avenue in Fort Greene, (718) 254-0808 | Hours: Monday-Friday 10 am-6 pm; Saturday, 11 am-6 pm; Sunday, noon-5 pm. Web: www.vespabk.com.

Holidays for the home

Your friend's house needs a little sprucing up, but you just don't know how to tell her. How about some fancy silverware or scented candles (\$25 each, or \$5.55 for mini candles) from Haystack Home and Body? Or perhaps it's time to replace that old sofa or get a new end table for the hallway. Again, Haystack has a great selection in many styles. The store even offers free in-home design consultation.

Haystack Home & Body | 130 Clinton St. between Joralemon and Livingston streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 246-2510 | Hours: Monday-Saturday, 11 am-7 pm; Sunday, noon-5 pm. Web: www.haystackhome.com.

Herbal holiday

If you're going for a healthier holiday dinner this year, take a look at New York Naturals' selection of organic health food and produce. If you need gifts for some high-stressed loved ones, the store specializes in herbal supplements and relaxing, all-natural beauty products. An herbal "Eskering" tea from remote Bhutan would make an exotic stocking stuffer (\$5.99). And while you're giving out gifts to everyone else, how about treating yourself to a carrot juice (\$1.99) or papaya smoothie (\$5.99) from the in-store organic juice bar.

New York Naturals | 253 Flatbush Ave., at Sixth Avenue in Prospect Heights (718) 230-7094 | Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 am-9 pm; Saturday-Sunday, 10 am-9 pm.

Take 'em to a show

If you haven't already seen Ridge Repertory's production of "The Man who Came to Dinner," it's a perfect family outing, or tickets (\$15 bucks apiece) make a wonderful gift for friends. Showing the next two Saturday nights at 8 pm and the next two Sunday afternoons at 3 pm.

Ridge Repertory | Bay Ridge Jewish Center at 81st Street and Fourth Avenue (718) 836-3103.

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Go 'Finger' it!

Billyburg's giant building can rise again

By Ben Muessig
The Brooklyn Paper

The city gave a thumbs-up to Williamsburg's notorious "Finger Building," granting the owners of the unfinished structure permission to complete their North Eighth Street tower.

After nearly three years of legal squabbles, the powerful Board of Standards and Appeals voted 4-0 (with one abstention) on Tuesday to allow the "Finger Building" — which earned its name because neighbors say it looks like a giant digit that's flipping the bird at its low-rise neighbors — to rise to its proposed 16-stories, despite a 2005 rezoning that caps buildings at 10 stories.

That's about as high as the building — designed by embattled architect Robert Scarano — ever got before the city halted construction over questions about the developers' open-space promises.

But this week, the BSA sided with the builders, ruling that the Department of Buildings "is prohibited from denying a permit based on a speculative future illegal use," and that the plans are sufficient to establish compliance with the open space requirements.

Unsurprisingly, opponents of



The "Finger Building," at 144 N. Eighth St., will be allowed to rise to its full 16 stories from the 10 in this picture.

the tower are miffed.

"It's a huge blow to the community," said Williamsburg activist Evan Thies. "Perhaps the most terrible thing is that this decision sets a precedent [that] the voice of the people can be quieted by

a developer-friendly board."

Even though the BSA approved the project, Thies and other neighbors are considering filing a new suit.

"This is not going to be the end of the fight," he said.

Warm days could end judges' parking reign

By Sarah Portlock
The Brooklyn Paper

The weather outside is frightful — which means the judges can keep their cars in a Columbus Park walkway a little while longer.

Wednesday's downpour prevented workers from completing construction of a parking lot for judges and other Supreme Court workers in the southern part of Columbus Park next to Borough Hall — so the occupation of the northern pedestrian pathway continues.

Workers still need two days

of dry, above-40-degree temperatures to finish paving and painting the new parking lot, said a Parks Department spokesman. During the two-month reconstruction, judges seized a walkway in the northern part of Columbus Park, angering many pedestrians.

"People would like to see the construction done, and we're very close," said Community Board 2 District Manager Rob Peris. "But if we don't get those warmer days, then we're stuck with the status quo, and I think everyone is ready to move be-

yond the status quo."

Temperatures are expected to remain below 40 for the next few days, according to the National Weather Service.

Once the work is finished, judges will put their mostly foreign cars in their new lot inside the park at the corner of Joralemon and Adams streets instead of overflowing their lot and parking on another pedestrian path just east of Borough Hall.

Workers have installed a new direct entrance to the lot from Joralemon Street, so judges won't use that bluestone-tiled pathway.

Reclaiming the space is a victory for the community, park advocates said. And even acting Administrative Judge Abe Gerges, who fought to maintain the driveway-like space, has called the compromise satisfactory.

"I think it all worked out in the best interest of the public as well as the judges — the public will have some more open space and the judges will have more parking," Gerges told The Brooklyn Paper. "They're working hard, and the only issue now is the weather and I don't think any of us have control over that, not even judges."

Brooklyn Heights Association Executive Director Judy Stanton said the imminent reopening was definitely "good news."

"Given the frigid weather, I won't expect dancing in the street, but springtime will bring people out to take advantage of the extra space," Stanton said. "We'll certainly enjoy the openness of a car-free pedestrian walkway."

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Seventh Avenue Art Supplies (374 Seventh Ave. between 11th and 12th streets in Park Slope) (718) 369-4969. Hours: Monday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm; Sunday, noon-5 pm.

Go go gadgets

The Mac Support Store offers repair and data recovery services on Apple products, and as an Apple Authorized Reseller, the store also sells brand new Mac computers and accessories, plus other computers, assembled right in the store. Nothing beats the gift of technology — especially at these prices!

Mac Support Store (168 Seventh St. at Third Avenue in Park Slope) (718) 312-8341. Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 am-6 pm; Saturday, 10 am-4 pm; closed Sunday. Web: www.macsupportstore.com.

They've been framed

Want to have your shopping during Christmas week? Head to Frame it in Brooklyn, where each framing customer will receive a free print — and this store has thousands to choose from.

Frame it in Brooklyn (767 Third Ave., between 25th and 26th streets in Greenwood Heights) (718) 788-7404. Hours: Monday-Saturday, 8:30 am-7 pm.

Grrr-eat fun for grrrr-eat dogs!

Grrr-emlins from Vo-Toy (\$9.25) are both fun and durable. Made of foam-stuffed latex, they will outlast other hollow rubber squeaky toys. All dogs will love the texture, but they are especially great for stronger chewers. Choose from three cheeky styles: Hornelius, Pecky or Sluggo. Big Shrimpy beds are both attractive and good for the environment. They are made from recycled materials and stuffed with eco-friendly fabric. Available in fleece or suede, they come in colors to fit any décor. Two outer layers protect the bed from dog messes, plus all parts are machine washable. Original style comes in small (\$89), medium (\$119) and large (\$130) and can be special ordered in any size or color.

The Tru-Fit Smart Harness from Kurgo (\$27.99) is a versatile and smart gift for the traveling dog lover. This sturdy and comfortable harness can be attached to a car seatbelt as well as used as a regular walking harness. It's fully adjustable and comes in small, medium, large and extra-large. They say that every dog has his day, and when he does, he'll be hungry, too. That's reason enough to highlight Galloping Gourmets baked treats (\$1.52/50) for your favorite dog. The unique, individual treats are baked and all natural (some are even wheat free).

Top Dog Shop (169 Lincoln Pl. at Seventh Avenue in Park Slope) (718) 246-4600. Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 am-7 pm; Saturday-Sunday, 9 am-7 pm.

Custom cordials

Let's face it: too many gift baskets consist of fruit or, worse, flowers. Finally, Mei Chi Liquor is giving us what we need: gift baskets of booze. Not only can the shop create a soothing display starting at \$15, but if you're buying in bulk (for your office holiday party, say), you'll enjoy a 10-percent discount. Not to encourage an overly lavish bacchanal, but if you buy 24 or more bottles, you save 15 percent. In other words, we're encouraging an overly lavish bacchanal.

Mei Chi Liquor (391 Flatbush Ave., between Sterling and St. Johns Places in Park Slope) (718) 622-1403. Hours: Monday-Saturday, 10:30 am-10 pm; Sunday, 1-9 pm.

Holiday beer bash

With more than 500 varieties of beer to choose from, Sunset Beer is the place to go to prepare for your upcoming holiday bash. From your favorite local brews to quirky European beers, this place has something for everyone. Kegs range in price from the \$70 Coors to the \$155 keg of Stella Artois. Sunset Beer Distributors (769 Third Ave., at 37th Street in Sunset Park) (718) 788-8000. Hours: Monday-Wednesday, 10 am-7 pm; Thursday-Saturday, 10 am-8 pm.

Warm drinks and goodies

Fill up the stockings and pantries of your favorite tea and coffee connoisseurs at this charming little shop. Groovy selection of teas, spice blends, condiments, preserves, holiday cookies and Birdie's homemade chocolates, mugs, teapots and all other handy hardware to enhance your holiday meals.

Two For The Pot (200 Clinton St. between Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn Heights) (855-8173. Hours: Monday-Friday, 12-7 pm; Saturday 10 am-6 pm; Sunday 1-5 pm.

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The Brooklyn Paper's essential guide to the Borough of Kings

December 13, 2008

Long live the '90s!

Great Clinton-era rockers are all over Brooklyn this month

By Ben Muessig
The Brooklyn Paper

The 1990s are back in Brooklyn, in a big way.

Rockers who made their names in the decade that gave us "Saved by the Bell," pugs, and the Spice Girls, are touring Brooklyn like it was — you guessed it — the '90s.

The Meat Puppets, that Arizona-based three-piece most famous for backing Kurt Cobain during his legendary "Unplugged" performance in 1993, will bring their brash — and at times purposefully out of tune — rock to the Music Hall of Williamsburg on Saturday for their first Brooklyn performance.

After releasing the gold record "Too High to Die" in 1994, the Puppets staggered through a druggy late '90s dotted with hiatuses before reuniting in 2006.

And when the rockers look back on their 11 records and 20-plus-year career, they're shocked to be considered an influential act.

"It blows our mind that we have been recognized for the course we chose," said bassist Chris Kirkwood. "It seems to validate what we were thinking when we first set course for our band, which was, just be really good, be absolutely open minded, and trust yourself, and your muse, and hope it reaches an appreciative audience."

It's not just North Brooklynites who will

MUSIC

Meat Puppets at the Music Hall of Williamsburg (46 North Sixth St., between Wythe and Kent avenues in Williamsburg, (718) 486-5400), Dec. 13, 7:30 p.m. Web: www.music-hall-of-williamsburg.com

Rhett Miller at the Bell House (149 Seventh St., between Second and Third streets in Gowanus, (718) 643-6510), Dec. 13, 8 p.m. Web: www.thebellhouse.com

Even Dando at Southpaw (125 Fifth Ave., between Sterling and St. John's places in Park Slope, (718) 230-0256), Dec. 19, 9 p.m. Web: www.spsounds.com



Meat Puppets: The Meat Puppets, who were much thinner in their 1980s heyday, are back — and performing on Dec. 13 at the Music Hall of Williamsburg.

have a chance to enjoy the Clinton-era fun. Even Dando — frontman of the recently reunited '90s alt-rockers, the Lemonheads — will play a solo gig at Southpaw in Park Slope on Friday, Dec. 19.

The Lemonheads rose to relative fame in 1993 when their cover of "Mrs. Robinson" appeared in the film "Wayne's World 2." Dando landed a coveted spot on People Magazine's list of the "50 Most Beautiful People" — but allegations of drug abuse and Johnny Depp-style hotel room decoration soured the band's reputation.

Fans can expect a few Lemonheads classics alongside Dando's solo songs at the Brooklyn gig.

Another frontman gone solo is Rhett Miller, the leader of the all-country standbys the Old 97s — a band whose name has only grown more accurate over the years.

Miller will bring his Texas-tinged pop to the Bell House in Gowanus on Saturday, Dec. 13, for his first-ever Brooklyn show.

The crooner, who started recording twangy albums when he was in high school, doesn't resent his '90s songs — in fact, he finds them transcendental.

"I don't feel any kind of disdain for any of the songs that I've written — even if I recognize them for being a more crude version of what I do now," said Miller. "As soon as I start playing a song, I get immediately transported back to the time when I wrote it."

The 1990s: A look back

Believe it or not, 1990s rock is back and better than ever. Members of three Clinton-era bands — the Lemonheads, the Meat Puppets and the Old 97s — will be performing in Brooklyn, so GO Brooklyn thought it best to provide a refresher course on what made them so great.

Lemonheads

The band's 1992 breakthrough album, "It's a Shame About Ray," seamlessly mixes elements of alternative rock, punk and pop. Its melodic harmonies and clever lyrics penned by lead singer Evan Dando set the musical standard for the decade's alt-rock explosion.

Meat Puppets

The band's 1994 album, "Too High to Die," is rife with the intricate guitars and mellow vocals that defined the Puppets' of beat sound. While it was the band's most successful album, any loyal fan will argue it never got the mainstream recognition it deserved.

Old 97s

The Dallas-based band transitioned away from alt-country and into a more pop-influenced sound by the time "Satellite Ride" was made in 2000, but the album is full of smart lyrics, upbeat melodies and just enough twang to assure fans the band is still attached to their roots.

— Emily Lavin

NIGHTLIFE

Tequila fun

When it came time to add a bar to La Taqueria, a longtime burrito institution on Seventh Avenue in Park Slope, owner Marty Medina didn't waste money on furnishings. Instead, he covered the wall with 100 bottles of tequila.

"I figured I could either spend money on decor or on tequila," he said, laughing at the three bottle-covered shelves.

Medina didn't only refurbish his popular restaurant; he's also trying to re-suscitate the reputation of its signature booze.

Tequila certainly deserves a revival. The best bottles in Medina's collection are aged (afijo) varieties that have many of the characteristics — oak, vanilla, honey undercurrents — that make single malt whiskeys go crazy.

And unlike Scotch, tequila is the ultimate mixer. Medina really shows it off in his house margarita — which uses fresh prickly pear juice.

It goes down easy. A little too easy.

La Taqueria (72 Seventh Ave., between Lincoln and Berkeley places, (718) 398-4300). Hours: Sunday–Thursday, 11:30 a.m.–11 p.m.; Friday–Saturday, 11 a.m.–11 p.m. Accepts American Express, MasterCard and Visa.

— Sarah Portlock

DINING

Corn meal

Grand Street is about to get a whole lot corner. On Monday, Williamsburg residents Maribel Araujo and Aristides Barrios will open Caracas Brooklyn — a Venezuelan restaurant specializing in the stuffed cornmeal patties called arepas.

"Arepas are something you can eat every single day — they're our bread in Venezuela," said Araujo, who also owns Manhattan's Caracas Arepa Bar.

The menu at Caracas Brooklyn will boast more than a dozen ethereal arepas, including the simple La Pasa (mild cheese, \$4.25), the hearty La Pasa (shredded beef and cheddar, \$6.25), and the upscale La Playa (fish, onions, peppers and herbs, \$6.50).

Unlike the tiny Caracas locations in Manhattan, the new eatery between Roebling and Havemeyer streets will boast a full bar and seating for 75.

Filling those seats won't be a problem.

"Young people who live here don't cook too much at home, so they need an affordable and fun way of eating every night — and that's what we're hoping to be," she said.

Caracas Brooklyn (291 Grand St., between Roebling and Havemeyer streets, (212) 529-2314). Major credit cards. www.caracasarepabar.com.

— Ben Muessig

DINING

Your noodle

There's a new nightclub in Williamsburg, and — gasp! — it's not alcoholic.

Momo Shirai and Mimami Yoshii are serving ramen, that traditional Japanese noodle soup, to booze-soaked revelers at their recently opened Bonjin Ramen every Friday night — err, Saturday morning — from midnight until 4 a.m.

In Japan, we go drinking, then we eat ramen — it's kind of a traditional thing," said Yoshii.

The Grand Street eatery, which is temporarily borrowing space from the Korean restaurant Dokkebi, offers savory ramen made from miso broth and topped with a heap of curly noodles, a fatty piece of pork belly, corn, scallions, and a garnish of fried noodles (\$10).

Of course, beer is available, too.

Following the Bonjin tradition, the once-a-week "movable restaurant" won't stick around for long: the midnight ramen will be available only through March.

"After that, who knows what we'll do," she said.

Bonjin Ramen is available at Dokkebi (199 Grand St., between Bedford and Driggs avenues in Williamsburg, (718) 782-1404) on Saturday from midday–4 a.m. Cash only. For info, visit www.bonjincafe.com.

— Ben Muessig

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SATURDAY December 13

Swingin' Victorians

Sexy singles? Victorian history? Hell, yes! Get some exercise, learn about a nice nabe, and most important, meet other singles during a holiday-themed walking tour of Brooklyn Heights that explores the neighborhood's 19th-century history (including the famed "Moonstruck" house, pictured).

1 pm. Meet in front of Borough Hall (Court St. at Renssen Street in Downtown, (917) 803-8551) \$15 (cash only).

SUNDAY December 14

Beer 'n' deer

Nothing in the world is better than a beer tasting with local brews, a live DJ, and all the venison you can eat! Sample suds from some local breweries while you shoot and nosh on delectable deer.

3-7 pm. Flatbush Farm (76 St. Marks Ave. at Flatbush Avenue, (718) 622-3276). Dishes, \$8-\$20.

MONDAY December 15

Wilkommen, bienvenue!

Let Gigi la Femme (pictured) and her bawdy burlesque babes tickle you in a seductive sex-soaked soiree. This is your last chance to catch Legs Malone and Peekaboo Pointe in the flesh as they strut those endless gams because, after tonight, it's curtains on this three-part series.

10 pm. Public Assembly (70 North Sixth St. between Kent and Wythe avenues in Williamsburg, (718) 384-4586). \$10.

SATURDAY December 20

It is alive!

Keep the Christ in Christmas by heading to New Utrecht Reformed Church in Bensonhurst, which will raise the sackcloth on its annual "Living Nativity" scene, complete with live sheep, live apostles, live wise men and a little baby Jesus at the center of it all (actual baby Jesus played by a doll).

3-6 pm. New Utrecht Reformed Church (18th Avenue between 83rd and 84th streets in Bensonhurst, (718) 236-0678).

SUNDAY December 21

Jew jokes

There's just something about a menorah that brings on those Adam Sandler-esque jokes. So tonight, following in the tradition of Jewish comedy, celebrate the first night of Hanukkah with martinis, lakses and some cutting-edge kosher standup. (Over 21 only, though.)

7:30 pm. Congregation B'nai Avraham (117 Renssen St. between Clinton and Henry streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 596-4840 ext. 18). \$18.

NINE DAYS IN BROOKLYN

Compiled by Susan Rosenthal Jay

SAT, DEC. 13

OUTDOORS

MORNING RUN: Sports invites runners to partake in a 5k or 10k spin around the park. 8 am. Meet at Grand Army Plaza entrance to Prospect Park (Union Street and Prospect Park West in Park Slope, (718) 230-4686).

BIRDING INTRO: Noon to 1:30 pm. Prospect Park Audubon Center (enter park at Lincoln Road and Ocean Avenue, (718) 287-3403). Free.

VICTORIAN BROOKLYN: Tour Brooklyn Heights. \$15. 1 pm. Meet at Court and Renssen streets in Brooklyn Heights, (917) 803-8551.

PERFORMANCE

THEATER, "SPANI": Weird dreamscape, passion, vengeance and more. \$5. 2 pm and 7:30 pm. Brooklyn College Department of Theater at New Workshop Theater (2000 Bedford Ave. at Hill Place in Flatbush, (718) 951-4503).

THEATER, "A TUNA CHRISTMAS": Gallery Players presents this 22-character comedy. 2 and 8 pm. Gallery Players (199 14th St., between Fourth and Fifth Avenues in Park Slope, (718) 352-3101). Tickets, \$18.

MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC: Concerts features a variety of Brooklyn-based musicians and offers music presentations, performances, workshops and jam sessions. Master class, \$10. 4:30-6 pm. Concerts, \$15. \$10 students. 7 pm, 8:15 pm and 9:30 pm. Berman Church (401 Adeline Ave. at Bond Street in Boerum Hill, (718) 369-6931).

CLASSICS AND CAROLS: Holiday concert. \$20. 10 kids under 12. 7 pm. Church of the Redeemer (541 Pacific St. at Fourth Avenue in Fort Greene, (917) 975-7625).

THEATER, "LIGHTING AT OUR FEET": Multimedia song cycle inspired by the poems Emily Dickinson. \$20-\$45. 7:30 pm. BAM Harvey Theater (651 Fulton St. between Ashland and Rockwell places in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4103).

DANCE, "BAMBOO BLUES": Contemporary

SUN, DEC. 14

PERFORMANCE

THEATER, "THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER": 1940s hit comedy about an egoistical celebrity. \$15. \$15 seniors/kids. 8 pm. Bay Ridge Jewish Center (Fourth Avenue and 81st Street in Bay Ridge, (718) 836-3103).

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FRI, DEC. 19

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CIVIC CALENDAR

MONDAY, DEC. 15

Community Board 2: Full board meeting. On the agenda: Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation will present its latest construction timeline. Brooklyn Hospital (DeKalb Avenue at St. Felix Street in Fort Greene). 6 pm. For info, call (718) 596-5410.

Community Board 10: Full board meeting. On the agenda: bicycle parking, Bay Ridge and Dyer Heights rezoning, and proposed MTA service cuts. Shore Hill Community Room (9030 Shore Rd. at 1st Street in Bay Ridge). 7:15 pm. For info, call (718) 745-6827.

TUESDAY, DEC. 16

Community Board 2: Transportation and public safety committee. On the agenda: City presentation on changing traffic patterns at Adams and Tillary streets. St. Francis College (180 Renssen St., between Court and Clinton streets in Brooklyn Heights). 6 pm. For info, call (718) 956-5410.

Community Board 1: Zoning and land use committee. Lady of the Snow Society (410 Graham Ave., between Willets and Jackson street in Williamsburg). 6:30 pm. For info, call (718) 389-0009.

68th Precinct Community Council: Monthly meeting. 85 South Oxford St. (between Lafayette and Greene avenues in Fort Greene). 7:30 pm. For info, call (718) 636-6511.

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WEDNESDAY, DEC. 17

Community Board 7: Full board meeting. Board office (4201 Fourth Ave. at 43rd St.). 6 pm. For info, call (718) 854-0003.

Community Board 2: Land use and youth committee. On the agenda: David Valent's Dock Street project. Brooklyn Hospital (121 DeKalb Ave., between Ashland Place and Fort Greene Park). 6 pm. For info, call (718) 596-5410.

THURSDAY, DEC. 18

Community Board 1: Public safety committee. Board office (435 Graham Ave. near the corner of Frost Street). 6:30 pm. For info, call (718) 389-0009.

To let an event in the Civic Calendar, e-mail Newsroom@BrooklynPaper.com.

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'Tuna' har har

This show is one big Christmas ham

By Sarah Portlock
The Brooklyn Paper

What is it about a man in a dress that will always make audiences laugh? So what happens when there are two men, both in dresses, big pearl earrings, and gams that go on for days?

You have "A Tuna Christmas," on stage now through Dec. 21 at the Gallery Players in Park Slope.

The play is set in the small (and fictional) town of Tuna, Texas, and showcases the strong personalities of 22 residents in the days leading up to Christmas. Nothing is sacred, and there are jokes made on behalf of the Texan-south accent, small people and a determination that the Christmas card term, "Ye merry gentlemen," is a merely a code phrase meaning "gay."

Justin Barnette and Brian Letchworth, the show's only actors, run frantically between scenes and expertly juggle between costume changes without any glitches. Each man never loses sight of a character's personality, which says something when each is playing 11 characters and every prop is pantomimed.

There's Bernita Bumiller (Barnette), a "well-fed" and proud



THEATER

"A Tuna Christmas" runs Thursday-Sunday from Dec. 6-21 at the Gallery Players (199 14th St., between Fourth and Fifth Avenues in Park Slope, (212) 353-3101). Tickets, \$18. Visit www.galleryplayers.com.

They're in 'Tuna': Brian Letchworth (left) and Justin Barnette play all 22 roles in "A Tuna Christmas," now at the Gallery Players in Park Slope.

mother in a bright green hoop skirt with a candy cane print with a troulemaking family, and DIDI Snavely (Letchworth) of DIDI's Used Weapons, who

enthusiastically decorates her Christmas tree with deactivated grenades and handgrenades. But the cherries on this delicious holiday fruitcake are Letchworth's portrayal of town official Dixie Deberry and Barnette's drama queen Joe Bob Lipsey.

I don't actually know which made me laugh harder: Letchworth, a thin man-turned-lady in a Day-Glo purple one-piece Nylon tracksuit, army boots, and grandma wig, or Barnette, a large man in only black tights, pumps, a tight red tank top, and a big cape.

For one second, Letchworth looked so much the part of a granny that I lost it. And when he (she?) started lip-synching holiday hits, tears streamed down my face.

As for Barnette, the man prancing about the stage in heels had everyone in stitches.

"Tuna" is not for opponents of comic vulgarity ("I hope Santa Claus takes a crap down your chimney") and people who don't appreciate subversive humor (such as that reference to the local Ku Klux Klan chapter's annual "White Christmas" party).

The actors are best in their element when they are in their loudest, proudest and sassiest female characters. And despite the audience's hysterics, Barnette and Letchworth never lost a cue or broke character. Whenever the inevitable inadvertent mishap did happen, both actors turned it so quickly into an element of the play that the humor raged on.

The show is slow to start, but the laughs start rolling soon enough. At first, its 2-1/2 hour run time seems tedious, but by the end, I'm not sure what could have been cut.

As with other Gallery Players shows I've reviewed, "A Tuna Christmas" is well worth a visit. I left with a fantastic feeling in my stomach after I'd been laughing for two hours, and I am still chuckling at the sight of that purple tracksuit. I fear I will be giggling at that for days to come.



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DESSERT: (Choice of One)
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FAMILY STYLE: Calamari Fritti and Zucchini Sticks

APPETIZER: Cold Antipasto
PASTA: (Choice of One) Penne Vodka or Penne Al Filetto di Pomodoro

ENTREE: (Choice of One) Chicken Vesuvio, Ribeye Steak, Veal Marsala or Salmon

FAMILY STYLE: Italian Cookies & Fresh Fruit Platter
DESSERT: Tiramisu with Vanilla Gelato

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DECEMBER RECOMMENDATIONS



These are Darrin's Best Buys for December!

Millaman Chardonnay 'Estate'

Delicious Chardonnay from one of Chile's oldest wineries... and one of it's best! I discovered this winery when I was a judge in the Wines of Chile 2007 competition, and I've been a fan ever since they took a gold medal! Rich, ripe, smooth and toasty with a 'spot-on' balance.

\$8.95



Excelsior Cabernet Sauvignon



What a mouthful of wine! Loads of black currant and blackberry aromas, with abundant flavors of black plums. The DeVet family has been making terrific wine in South Africa since 1697. Plenty of "fruit-forward" flavors along with a definite sense of "terroir". Old World meets New, at a great price!

\$9.49

Marquee GSM 'Classic'

An Australian take on a French classic. All through the south of France, wines are made from a blend of Grenache, Syrah & Mourvèdre. This is the same blend, but from Australia, resulting in a less earthy but more flavorful red wine. You'll smack your lips once you taste it.

\$9.95



Luc Pirlot Merlot



90 points for under \$10? That's right! This barrel-aged, full-flavored red, deep garnet wine has a rich bouquet of ripe blackberries and vanilla with a touch of toasty oak. Well balanced & smooth, with enough tannins to stand up to a good steak.

\$9.95

Buy Darrin's Best Buys 4 Pack and Save 10%
\$36.27



Darrin's December Discovery Wines!

Grillo, Disisa, Sicily '06



Is there a better seafood wine anywhere than Grillo? Grillo has been grown for winemaking in Sicily since the earliest of times, loved for its delightfully light aromas, its refreshing yet dry flavors of peaches and citrus as well as the crisp tang and smooth balance that makes it such a wonderful wine to enjoy simply by itself or with almost any fish dishes as well as chicken and lighter cheeses. From grapes grown in an 11th century vineyard in Monreale, home to the most respected Grillos in Sicily, this is the wine we'll be drinking on Christmas Eve with our "Feast of the Fishes"!

\$15.95

Côtes du Roussillon Rouge, Walden '06

Named for Henry David Thoreau's "Walden," and made in the spirit of his philosophy of living in harmony with nature. The nose is filled with blackberries, black cherries & black plums. On the palate, flavors of blueberry, blackberry, black cherry & anise with some Port-like notes. Smooth on the tongue, supple and mouth-filling with complexity and depth. This wine is drinking well right now, and will complement rich, flavorful dishes like roasts & stews. I recommend that you decant this big, bold red about a half hour before drinking: it will open up beautifully!

\$14.95



Buy my December Discovery Wines
Two Pack and Save 10%
\$27.82

Darren's "Spirit of the Month!"

Triple Eight Vodka

Every year, my grandmother would flavor a bottle, adding a dried lingersine peel one year, a small handful of cherry pits the next. After a week or two, the bottle would go into the freezer, to be enjoyed in small sips. Finding good vodka isn't easy. That's why I'm so enthusiastic about Triple Eight! The cranberry is light & dry, while the blueberry is a knockout. This is one you must try!

\$31.49

Darrin's "Stocking Stuffer"

Château du Grand Mouëys, 1er Côtes de Bordeaux

Save \$5... and be a very good Santa! Plenty of those lovely dark fruit aromas: plums, figs, blueberries, currants, slate and minerals. One size fits all, and leave a bottle out for Santa.

\$11.95



Organic Wine of the Month

Cantina Ciolli 'Silene'



A delicious, hand-made red wine from Lazio, this small family owned vineyard & winery lies 40 km south of Rome. This is a wine of complexity: intense and deeply flavored yet fresh & lively on the palate. The wine is full-flavored and smooth as silk, this wine has finesse balance & depth.

\$16.95

What I'm Drinking Now

Schneider, Cabernet Franc/Petit Verdot, 2005

Our good friend (and Park Slope neighbor) Bruce Schneider has hit one right out of the ballpark this time! For years, I've been saying that the North Fork of Long Island, with its Bordeaux-like temperate climate, produces the finest Cabernet Franc wines made in America. This is, simply, a beautiful wine, fit for a gracious holiday table.

\$11.95





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Trying to make 'Census' of Brooklyn

DC bean-counters release a treasure trove of statistics on changing borough

Richer and whiter

An explosion of cash from Park Slope to Red Hook has priced out many minority families, the data show. Of all New York's neighborhoods, the broad stretch west of Prospect Park had the biggest jump in median household income — 23 percent, to \$77,784 — partly because nearly a fifth of black and Hispanic families, who earn half as much as their white counterparts, left during the seven-year period. The area is now 62 percent white, up 13 percent from 2000, and the median income of white families has grown to nearly \$92,000 — which perhaps explains why upscale real-estate clothing stores and real-estate agents have sprung up.

The biggest changes can be felt along Park Slope's Fifth Avenue and Smith Street in Cobble Hill and Carroll Gardens, where higher-end restaurants and chic cocktail bars are supplanting bodegas and old-time Mom and Pop stores. Such a trend actually helps drive out poorer residents.



Whiter: New stats also show that Cobble Hill, Park Slope and Carroll Gardens are getting whiter.

"The services in the neighborhood aren't serving the long-time residents anymore," said Theo Moreo, of Families United for Race and Economic Equality. "Even if you can afford the rent, if you can't afford the supermarket, you have to go. With pro-development administration, gentrification will continue."

W'burb book club

The census didn't count ironic beards or tight pants, but Williamsburg and Greenpoint's hipsterization is symbolized by the neighborhoods' skyrocketing population of scholars. There are about 80 percent more college graduates in the area than there were in 2000, and Masters degrees and doctorates are up by more than a third, to 10 percent of the residents. Still, Williamsburg-Greenpoint has to do some studying to catch up with Park Slope, Carroll Gardens and Cobble Hill, where fully 30 percent of residents have a Masters degree or higher. Bedford Avenue's Spoonbill and Sugarbush have had to adapt to serve the new breed of bookworm.

The bookseller only stocked art and design items when it opened in 1999, but it's been expanding its selection to satisfy the largely wealthier and more educated new residents, according to manager Quentin Rwan.



Smarter: Data show more people with college and Masters degrees in Williamsburg and Greenpoint.

"We wouldn't ever have thought to carry something like the new Makom Gladwell book 'Outliers' in the past, but now people come in asking for it all the time, so we carry it," Rwan said. "Williamsburg is not just all people who went to art school anymore."

It's a baby boom

Those double-wide strollers blocking Fifth Avenue and Court Street are no mirage! The number of children under-5 shot up 35 percent in the area between Park Slope and Red Hook. That's a lot of mouths to feed. This toddlerly boom comes as no surprise to Slopers, who have seen parenting group Park Slope Parents — founded in 2002 — grow to 6,000 members and baby stores sprout across the neighborhood. Six of those stores are owned by Loretta Gendville, whose small business was turned into a veritable infant empire by the Sheela's growing demand for children's clothing and gifts. "It was kind of a fluke," explained Gendville, who owns the Area Kids chain. "I opened the first when I had my daughter [in 2003]. It was an immediate success, so I kept opening more. I ended up opening all my stores within two years."

But there's a bright spot for the Slope's beleaguered spotless residents. Gendville thinks the economic downturn might send Brooklyn's mating-minded residents elsewhere. "I'm definitely thinking about opening another store. With the economy right now, maybe in Fort Greene, but it's expensive there, too."



More kids: Census numbers confirmed the baby boom in Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill and Park Slope.

less residents. Gendville thinks the economic downturn might send Brooklyn's mating-minded residents elsewhere. "I'm definitely thinking about opening another store. With the economy right now, maybe in Fort Greene, but it's expensive there, too."

Mixing it up

The white population of Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights and Bensonhurst has dropped slightly, but Asian families have been flocking to the neighborhoods, and the school-age population is through the roof. Roughly 19,000 more Asians live in the area than in 2000, an increase of 34 percent. And the number of kids between 5 and 18 in Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights has climbed 14 percent. It's certainly showing up at a local school. PS 69, at the corner of 63rd Street and Ninth Avenue, opened just a few years ago to serve a rapidly growing Asian neighborhood. It's already considering building an annex.

"As soon as PS 69 opened, it was at capacity," said Josephine Beckmann, district manager of Community Board 10. "When you have new families, you tend to have an increase in children and you have to figure out how to serve the new population. To help the new Chinese residents, the Brooklyn Chinese-American Association has expanded its services from Sunset Park into Bay Ridge, offering additional day-care programs and opening a senior center. So it's no surprise that the influx of Asians has turned Avenue U into the city's fifth Chinatown.



More diverse: Bensonhurst and Bay Ridge have seen big increases in Asians and Russians.

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The Brooklyn Paper

KIDS • SCHOOL • STYLE • TEENS • CAMPS • MUSIC

Where in the world is Teen Spirit?

On a Saturday night at 10, Smartnom got a call from a high school friend with a bad case of parent-of-teen angst. Her son, a ninth grader, seems to have jumped into the swimming pool of adolescence rebellion with great abandon. Her friend is just hoping he can swim. To Smartnom it sounded like standard-issue teenage problems: smoking pot, lying, not getting good grades, and going to parties at unsupervised addresses. Who didn't do all that stuff when he or she was a teenager in the 1970s? And who isn't freaked out by it when the teenager happens to be his or her kid in 2008? Smartnom barely knew what to say. She definitely didn't have any easy answers or sure-fire solutions. It's not like she has a parenting column in a local newspaper or anything. Telling her friend to fasten her seat belt and get ready for a long, bumpy ride realistically wouldn't be the most comfort-



By Louise Crawford

ing thing, but Smartnom ached for her friend, who sounded so scared. What if he becomes a heroin addict? What if he can't get into a good college? What if he ruins his life? Smartnom tried to quell her friend's hysteria. "Whoa," she said. "You're going from 0-60 like an Audi TT. Get back in the used Toyota for a second. Stay calm. Take it one day at a time." Sure, Smartnom was spewing meaningless clichés and platitudes. But what else was she going to say? "Yeah, you're right, he'll probably be smoking crack by week's end?" Sure, there are plenty of people who would react that way. They'd quote the experts, give you the name of shrink, suggest NA or AA. Maybe that's why her friend called her. She knew she'd get a more laid-back approach. That's not to say that Smartnom isn't realistically: "One thing's for sure, you're going to have to be tough, set



By Louise Crawford

limits and accept that your kid isn't going to like you very much for the next few years," she told her friend. But Smartnom knows that as a parent, you're not just a parent, you're a parent who's been there. "He already hates me," she laughed. "I'm used to that." But Smartnom knows that as a parent, you're not just a parent, you're a parent who's been there. "He already hates me," she laughed. "I'm used to that." But Smartnom knows that as a parent, you're not just a parent, you're a parent who's been there. "He already hates me," she laughed. "I'm used to that."

going on with her very own Teen Spirit. At 17, he's a very independent soul. Often, Smartnom has only the vaguest idea where he's ever been. It's a terrible feeling. How can she protect him from the problems if he barely wants to talk, let alone take her advice? And the hardest part is discerning whether your kid is going through a phase or if he or she is settling into a life of substance abuse, slackerness, a career as an artist, or worse (worse than a career as an artist? Scary!). Smartnom and her friend talked about the kids they knew in high school who were big drug users. One guy actually died because a heroin addict and died a few years ago. But another guy, who dropped

acid hundreds of times in high school and college, is a lawyer who lives in Westchester with two kids in college. So you never know. Smartnom and Hepcat weren't druggie teens (a little here, a little there), so they've taken a wait-and-see approach. Frankly, they don't know if their son has ever tried the stuff. Maybe they're in denial, maybe they're just dumb. As they talked on Saturday night, Smartnom heard her friend negotiating with his son. He had a friend over and they wanted to get some air. She let him go out, but she told him to stand on the street where she could watch him from their eighth-floor window. Control. Other illusions of control. That's what it's all about, you can ground them, spy on them, and drug test them, but you're just putting off the inevitable lifetime when you have no control over your children at all. And that's the hardest thing of all. You hope you've encouraged them to be smart, cautious and totally in sync with everything you care about. But who knows if it takes?

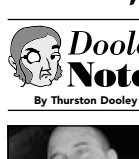
Indeed, even as Smartnom was encouraging her friend to keep an eye on her boy, she herself didn't have a clue where Teen Spirit was. Probably some club in Bushwick. She told her there's no shame in calling him every half-hour even if she herself hadn't communicated with Teen Spirit in hours. Every day that you keep a good eye on your kids, you're one day closer to the day when they'll have more sense and maturity (one hopes). And one day closer to the day when you'll have less control. Smartnom can hardly wait.

Welcome back, Kaplan



By Thurston Dooley III

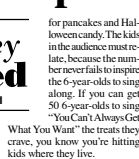
If there is a more challenging artist working the seamy birthday party and Park Slope Parents' bootstrapping circuit than Randy Kaplan, I have not met his acquaintance. Kaplan's great gift for kid-centric blues-rock was on display yet again at Park Slope's Southpaw during a happy hour gig on Sunday afternoon (it was happy hour for the adults; the target audience limited itself to sippy cups and juiceboxes). I found myself, as always, unable to adequately praise Kaplan, who, in just a few years, he has established himself as the premiere act on the circuit. Where other saccharine-set stars sing about space ships and moon-shaped pizzas, Kaplan plumbs the truth of today's childhood experience. He sings of roaches scurrying behind your walls. He sings of mosquitoes. He sings of having the blues (albeit for grape juice). Kaplan is a modern-day Leadbelly crossed with just enough Laurie Berkner to maintain the childish temperament. Indeed, one of his biggest sing-along numbers is his recent version of "You Can't Always Get What You Want."



By Thurston Dooley III

For pancakes and Hall-lorwen candy. The kids in the audience must relate, because the man never fails to inspire the 6-year-olds to sing along. If you can get 50 6-year-olds to sing "You Can't Always Get What You Want" the treats they come, you know you're hitting kids where they live. Kaplan may never become a kids music ambassador like the lovable Dan Zanes, and he won't sell records like the Wiggles. But his is the true voice of discord and subversion. Where other singers pull out "This Land is Your Land," Kaplan is more likely to sing about a shark slithering up through the sewer system and demanding, "Shampoo me!" Where other songwriters limit their lyrics to cutesies or taxi rides, Kaplan has a new song in which he bewails an unruly cat because its claws are so close to a "Chagall" lithograph I inherited from my grandma."

We all know such animals, but only Randy Kaplan writes about them.



By Thurston Dooley III

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We all know such animals, but only Randy Kaplan writes about them.

FAMILY CALENDAR

Compiled by Susan Rosenthal Jay



He's a good man: The Pig Brooch Theatre Company will present "A Charlie Brown Christmas," live on stage at the Brooklyn Lyceum on Dec. 19-21.

SATURDAY, DEC 13
10 am-3:30 pm: Winter crafts fair — with Santa (not the real name). Free. Community Center, 139 Eighth Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues in Park Slope, (718) 965-3695.
11 am and 2 pm: Art-making class. \$5, children 12 and under. Free. Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway at Washington Avenue near Prospect Park, (718) 638-5000.
Noon and 3 pm: Arts, crafts and songs with Rachel Trachtenberg. \$30 per family or \$15 per person. \$7 kids. Galapagos Art Space, 16 Main Street at Water Street in DUMBO, (718) 224-8500.
Noon-3 pm: Have a few words with Santa and get a gift. Weichert Realtors (718) 865-5100. In Bay Ridge, (718) 232-1004.
12:30 pm and 2:30 pm: "Hansel and Gretel." Puppetworks (338 South Ave. at Fourth Street in Park Slope, \$7. Call (718) 965-3391 for info.
2 pm: Holiday show. \$10. South Oxford Space (138 South Oxford St. in Fort Greene, (718) 503-4703).
5 pm: "A Brooklyn Nutcracker." 12 girls without reception: \$20. \$10 kids. Call for info on reception. Brooklyn Music School, 126 St. Felix St. at Lafayette Avenue in Fort Greene, (718) 638-5600.
SUNDAY, DEC 14
12:30 pm and 2:30 pm: "Hansel and Gretel." See Sat., Dec. 13.
2 pm: Holiday favorite: "The Colonial Nutcracker." \$6. Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Whitman Theater at Brooklyn College (2900 Campus Road at Hill Place in Flatbush, (718) 951-1000).
To list your event, e-mail information to Calendar@BrooklynPaper.com.

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OUR OPINION

Yes to Dock St. project

David Walentas, who almost single-handedly converted a waterfront warehouse district beneath the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges into a thriving neighborhood of art studios, craftspeople, Mom-and-Pop stores and residents, wants to continue the momentum by building a 365-unit residential building on empty land along Dock Street in DUMBO.

The project is under intense fire from Councilman David Yassky and a community group from outside the neighborhood because the structure includes an 18-story wing that the opponents say will block views of the iconic Brooklyn Bridge.

These critics are wrong. In 2004, Walentas proposed a much-different project on the same site, a building whose bulk was positioned right alongside the bridge and would indeed have diminished many views of the span.

But the current version of the project has

not only solved that problem, but added in new public benefits that make it worthy of city approval.

For one thing, Walentas has promised to set aside space in the new building for a public middle school — a commitment that would save the city close to \$50 million in school construction costs (and an unquantifiable amount of construction headaches).

In addition, the project now earmarks 65 units at below-market-rate prices, a bid to add some diversity to the increasingly homogeneous DUMBO community.

And Walentas has vowed that the new building would be a "green" one certified by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a respected environmental group.

As a result, the new Dock Street project is a victory for the DUMBO community.

It is also an important win for a much broader community: all New Yorkers who

rely on strong public oversight of the development process to ensure that their neighborhoods don't become blighted canvases for builders whose only goal is profits.

Walentas needs a zoning change to make his Dock Street dream a reality.

That requirement allowed community leaders and elected officials to pick apart the original project, a process that revealed its flaws and prevented it from being built.

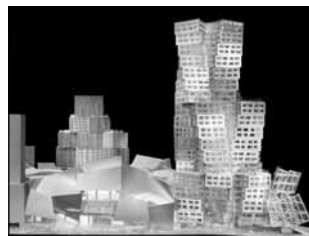
Such public review was entirely lacking at Bruce Ratner's Atlantic Yards, where a cursory environmental impact review found serious flaws, yet because no approval was needed by a local agency or elected official, the flaws were never corrected.

On Dock Street, however, the system worked: A flawed project was rejected, and the developer went back to the drawing board and returned with a better design that includes substantial public benefits.

That's why Walentas's Dock Street project has our support.

ALL DRAWN OUT

Happy 5th, Atlantic Yards!



Revised renderings of the Atlantic Yards project from May reveal a trimmed-down "Miss Brooklyn" tower and an arena design that is similar to architect Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. At present, only the arena and residential tower behind it are being discussed.

FIVE YEARS LATER, YARDS STUCK

Continued from page 1
time and see what our next steps are.

Evaluate the market? How did this done deal come so undone? The project was certainly greeted with cheering and adoring from some community leaders, elected officials and, yes, most of the city's press corps on Dec. 10, 2003, when Ratner and Gehry made their first presentation of their still-unfinished design at Borough Hall. At the time, Ratner said that the arena — then priced at \$396-million — would be built with private money.

Borough President Markowitz immediately positioned himself as the principal cheerleader of a project that he said would be a "win-win for the community [and] Brooklyn." But the arena's cost has ballooned to close to \$1 billion — all of it fronted by the public, and Markowitz's reputation took a blow when it was revealed that charities he controls had received at least \$400,000 in corporate contributions from Forest City Ratner.

At this point, the larger project — all those Gehry towers, the promised seven acres of publicly accessible open space, 6,800 units of housing (2,250 of them below-market rate), and construction jobs, as well as the Nets arena — is stalled.

Readers of The Brooklyn Paper say it's coming years ago. Here's why:

No public review

Project opponents charge that the Original Sin of Atlantic Yards was a decision by the Empire State Development Corporation — a state agency that had the Bloomberg administration's blessing — to allow Ratner to proceed without the rigorous public review required of other developers who seek even the smallest land-use change from the city.

As a result, critics say, the project was never reviewed in the same way that independently driven projects are looked at, and many red flags weren't caught as a result. The developer did admit to many potential flaws in its draft Environmental Impact Statement, but because there was no real public review, there was no accountability for fixing them.

As the statement indicates, the



An view of the Atlantic Yards footprint, taken by the Municipal Arts Society earlier this year.

huge influx of housing would have created the densest census tract in the country, which would put a significant strain on the public school system, already-choked intersections, aging sewers and the city's existing police and fire protection.

Ratner did sign a "Community Benefits Agreement" with six community groups in 2004, but closer inspection revealed that several of the groups did not even exist prior to signing the contract with Ratner. Worse, the deal made specific unenforceable promises and barred the groups from saying anything critical about the project.

So it was only fitting that last December, when departing Deputy Mayor Dan Doherty was leaving office, he said that if the city could do the project all over again, it would have demanded a proper public review.

Towers of lies

Ratner may have only himself to blame for his predicament, given that so many promises — promised that gave cover to the elected officials who originally backed the project — have turned out to be hollow.

After years of pie-in-the-sky projections, state officials admitted in

December 2006, that the project would only create \$15.7 million in tax revenues every year for the city and state — nearly \$5 billion less over 30 years than project boosters initially promised.

A 52,000-square-foot "public" park atop the arena, which would have been a track in summer and ice-skating rink in winter, turned out to be a private space.

That 10-year construction timeline? In March 2007, Ratner revealed that the full project would not be done until at least 2022, despite officials once saying it could be done by 2012.

A year later, in March 2008, Ratner finally admitted that his mega-project was doomed. At that time, he unveiled an altered version that consisted of little more than the arena and two scaled-back residential buildings.

Lawsuits

Opponents of Atlantic Yards say that the project might have avoided lawsuits entirely had it gone through a rigorous public review.

Absent that review, a group called Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn emerged as the principal opposition when Ratner announced his investment team's successful bid to buy the Nets in 2004.

Developer since the project started, Forest City Ratner has said recently that it will not continue work until litigation is wrapped up, which will be well into 2009.

The first suit, filed in January 2006 in state Supreme Court, charged that the state wrongfully approved the demolition of six buildings within the project's footprint.

A second suit, filed in April 2007 against the Empire State Development Corporation, charged that

state officials approved the project without fully considering its environmental impacts. A Manhattan supreme court judge ruled in favor of the state this January, but the plaintiffs have appealed.

The U.S. Supreme Court decided not to hear a third case on the state's use eminent domain power to transfer privately owned land to a private developer, but the case was refilled in state court, where DDB lawyers say they have found a "silver bullet" to kill the project: a clause in the state Constitution that bars public money from underwriting any urban renewal project unless the housing created by the project is "restricted to persons of low income." A hearing is set for January.

The downturn

As part of his sweetheart deal to control the Vanderbilt Yards, Ratner must renovate the yards so that they can still function even with an arena on top of them. That work began in February 2007, but last week, it abruptly stopped. Ratner says it's because the first phase of the work has been completed. Others aren't so sure.

Develop Don't Destroy spokesman Daniel Goldstein said the work stoppage is a delay tactic.

"No one knows how long the economy is going to stay this way, and we can't let Ratner tread water on our land forever," Goldstein said on Wednesday. "If it's up to Ratner, they'll wait as long as they can. But it's time for the governor to rescue the community from what is turning into a disaster."

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Mayor Bloomberg, then-Gov. Pataki, Bruce Ratner, Sen. Charles Schumer, Vinny Viola, and hip-hop artist Jay-Z were all smiles when Ratner announced his investment team's successful bid to buy the Nets in 2004.



A surveillance video shows a deliveryman scratching up the wall of an elevator.

PIZZA...

Continued from page 1

back in criminal court on Jan. 26 and it's unclear if his lawyer will instruct him to adopt a rope-a-dope style of defense, like the prizefighter who shares his name, or do something the ex-champ never did — take a dive.

Meanwhile, the rental building owner where it was filmed scratched his alter ego in the elevator is still stressing for \$3,200 in damages from the Papa John's branch on Livingston Street where the deliveryman worked.

Some lawyers say that a judge is unlikely to hold the franchise owner responsible for his former deliveryman's alleged misconduct, but the landlord says he's been advised that his complaint will hold up in court.

"Papa John's hired him, he was their agent," said Michael Cantor, the owner.



"Real World: Brooklyn" cast member Devyn Simone.

FABULOUS

Continued from page 1

press a backstage tour of the house at the end of Pier 41 in Red Hook. And while the setting could initially make any left-loving Brooklynite nod, closer inspection revealed a house that is more movie set than cradle pad.

Very few of the walls go up to the ceiling, and there are big box set lights affixed to the ceilings. The "bathroom" was more like a tiled space in the corner of the house, with three fog-free, clear glass shower stalls and an open sink area.

The only doors on the toilets, but, as one cast member said, the walls "are like cardboard" (and then giggled, with a knowing smile).

MTV has its work cut out by the time "Real World: Brooklyn" airs in January if it wants to make its current season look as classy as seasons past.

In earlier years, cast members have wasted away their nights drinking in the house, making out in the hot tub and

partaking in other general tomfoolery and mayhem. But not this time, apparently.

"In past seasons, the cast was drinking and partying. We were playing cards," said one castmate, Sarah Rice, laughing. "I swear we're more interesting than that!"

In interviews, each castmate seemed polite and strangely normal. They played the video game RockBand together, and shot pool. When they did go out, they mostly went to Gaphattan (is this just "Real World: New York" that just happens to have a Brooklyn crib?).

Not for Katelynn Cusanello, 24, the series' first transgender female.

"I fell in love and hung out a lot in Park Slope, Red Hook and Williamsburg," she said, adding that she talked to old Red Hookers about the area before gentrifiers (or, um, the "Real World" cast, moved in).

These days, the housemates pursue their own projects, a format that alleviated potential melodrama.

"It gave us space alone and meant we could get along," he explained. But the group did involve with everybody else's life, going to each other's open mic nights or practicing dance moves.

And the cameras were there, always rolling.

"It was kind of flattering," admitted the hipster Mormon, Chet Cannon, 23.

But will it amount for good TV? That remains to be seen.

"The Real World: Brooklyn" premieres on MTV on Wednesday, Jan. 7 at 10 p.m.

FOSSELLA...

Continued from page 1

is the beginning of the process — which is a right to a trial by jury," he told the Staten Island Advance.

Fossella, in Congress since a 1997 special election, was convicted on Oct. 17 for drunk driving stemming from a May 1 binge that started with a few glasses of wine, led to ill-ad-

vised excursion to his mistress's house and his eventual arrest after going through a stop light. The arresting officer testified that Fossella also had a daughter with the mistress, a revelation that ended his political career. Fossella decided not to seek re-election when amid the consuming scandal.

In Monday's hearing, Fos-

sell's legal team tried to convince the judge to go easy on the five full-term congressman, claiming the Breathalyzer test malfunctioned. But their star witness, a toxicologist, failed to show up in court to dispute blood readings of .17.

Fossella had spent that day hunkering at the White House, where the Super Bowl champion New York Giants were toasted, and then carousing out on the town, according to various press

accounts shortly after the arrest made front-page news.

Democrats seized the golden opportunity to claim the only Republican seat in the city, and Councilman Mike McMahon (D-Staten Island) soundly thrashed GOP nominee, Bob Stranieri in November.

There is talk that Fossella will try to revive his political fortunes with a run in 2010, but constituents indicated that such a run would be foolhardy for the family values pol.

"I feel the same way about athletes as I do about politicians — you're supposed to set an example and that's no example," said Eileen Sacco, president of the 68th Precinct Community Council. "No one should drive drunk."

Obama must have done a good job; nearly 20 years later, Goldberg still considers himself a friend, has occasionally been an adviser, and remains a dedicated campaign contributor.

That's a lot more support than Goldberg has given the other political rival that vanquished him in a bitter ninth-grade student council election.

It soared him on politics for years — until, that is, a man named Barack Obama beat the pants off him.

that this election would change history.

"Now it can be told: We drank a shot of vodka and went to the vote," Goldberg said. "But there wasn't much tension, partly because we were friends, but mostly because I had no realistic chance against Barack. I am quite confident that the final vote was extremely lopsided. Barack was a very compelling candidate, as he proved to be for president. He was just as impressive a character then as now."

Goldberg had no time to sulk, ei-

OBAMA...

Continued from page 1

agreed to talk to this reporter because he can only assume, this reporter called him and asked. Here's how it went down: Like a proto-reality show, all of the hopefuls gathered in a room while their jury — the 60 or so Law Review writers and editors — winnowed the field one by one over the course of the day.

"It was somewhat absurd," Goldberg recalled, "because 19 people wanted the job out of 35 potential candidates. There was certainly no shortage of ego or ambition in the room."

Eventually, just two men were standing: Obama and Goldberg. And both waited in a room together, perhaps unaware (or perhaps all too aware)

themselves, as Obama tapped him to be a teacher, and Goldberg got his dreams of reading law journal articles for 40 hours a week while at Obama got the headache of overseeing every phase of the 300-page monthly publication.

In other words, perfect preparation for becoming president, right counselor?

"Not at all," Goldberg said. "There's no way in which it's preparation for being president. But watching Barack did show me what a great manager and leader he was. Think about

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